



INFORMATION SHEET

**METHICILLIN-RESISTANT STAPHYLOCOCCUS AUREUS (MRSA)**

FEBRUARY 2008

**WHAT IS MRSA?**

**RISK FACTORS FOR COMMUNITY-ACQUIRED MRSA**

- **Young age.** Immune systems are not fully developed. Also, much more likely to develop dangerous forms of pneumonia than older populations.
- **Participation in contact sports.** MRSA spreads easily through cuts and abrasions and skin-to-skin contact.
- **Sharing towels or athletic equipment.**
- **Having a weakened immune system.** More likely to have severe community-acquired MRSA infections.
- **Living in crowded or unsanitary conditions.** Examples: military training camps; American and European prisons.
- **Association with health care workers**

**'STAPH' BACTERIA**

(*Staphylococcus aureus*) are commonly found on the skin and in the nose of healthy people. It is the most common cause of skin infections. Most of these skin infections (e.g. Pimples, boils or abscesses) are minor and can be treated without antibiotics (drugs used to kill bacteria). However, staph bacteria also can cause serious infections such as surgical wound infections and bloodstream infections).

Methicillin-resistant *S. aureus* (MRSA or 'mersa') is a staph that has developed resistance to a commonly used class antibiotics called 'beta-lactams' (e.g. penicillins - methicillin, nafcillin, amoxicillin, oxacillin, among others). MRSA can cause minor skin infections and, if not treated properly, more serious infections such as pneumonia and bloodstream infections. MRSA infections are

more difficult to treat, but usually respond to draining of wounds and/or antibiotics. Drainage of skin boils or abscesses should only be done by a healthcare provider.

**HOW MRSA IS SPREAD?**

MRSA is usually spread through direct physical contact with an infected person, but also may be spread through contact with contaminated objects or surfaces. It is not spread by coughing unless the infected person has MRSA pneumonia.

**COLONIZATION vs. INFECTION?**

*Colonization* means MRSA is present in or on the body but is not causing illness. (This applies to approximately 10-30% of the population.)

*Infection* means MRSA is present and causing symptoms or illness.



Skin infections caused by MRSA/Staph. Photos from CDC Public Health Image Library.

**HOW TO PREVENT MRSA INFECTIONS**

**Practice good skin care**

- \_ Clean hands thoroughly and frequently with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- \_ Keep skin clean and bathe with soap.
- \_ Avoid contact with other people's wounds, infected skin, or dirty bandages.
- \_ Do not share personal

- hygiene products (e.g. toiletries and towels).
- \_ Do not scratch rashes or bumps.
- \_ Keep all wounds clean and covered.

**Avoid contact with contaminated surfaces.**

- \_ Disinfect shared equipment daily; routinely wipe surfaces clean between users.

- \_ Have a towel or shirt between your bare skin and exercise equipment .
- \_ Machine wash and dry linens.

**Recognize common symptoms of skin infections**

- \_ Always seek medical attention if you develop a painful bump, red or inflamed skin, an insect or spider bite, or a sore that does not go away or is getting bigger.

